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## Letter dated 4 May 2012 from the Chairperson of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

In my capacity as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I have the honour to share with you the main outcomes of a mission that I recently undertook to Burundi, from 18 to 25 April 2012.

My visit was part of the regular engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with Burundi and was intended as a follow-up to the meeting of the Commission with the second Vice-President of Burundi on 12 April 2012, in New York focused on the second poverty reduction strategy paper and the related resource mobilization efforts. On my way to Bujumbura, I paid a brief visit to European Union headquarters in Brussels to meet Ambassador Koen Vervaeke, European Union Director for the Horn of Africa, East and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean and Senior Coordinator of the European Union for the Great Lakes Region.

The visit was also undertaken partly pursuant to Security Council resolution 2027 (2011) of 20 December 2011, in which the Council encouraged the Government of Burundi, the Peacebuilding Commission and its national and international partners to honour their commitments made under the outcome document of the fifth review of the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi and to review these commitments once the second poverty reduction strategy paper had been finalized, in order to determine how the Commission could best contribute to Burundi's peacebuilding priorities.

In the course of my stay in Burundi, I met with several interlocutors, including at the highest levels of Government, as well as other key stakeholders in the country.

My overall impression is that the situation in the country has further stabilized and progressed since my last visit, in the fourth quarter of 2011. This is reflected in the substantial improvement in the relationship between the ruling political party and the opposition not represented in parliament. The harsh and sometimes provocative language which I heard from both sides in the past has disappeared or at



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least has considerably subsided. It seems that the Government and the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) as the majority party have come to the conclusion that it would be better to give political space to the opposition in the lead-up to the next elections in 2015.

The recent change in the leadership of CNDD-FDD (its party leaders and wings of women and youth) further highlights a positive evolution in the political situation. At the same time, the opposition, while still occasionally very critical of the Government, has moderated its behaviour and participated, for instance, in a recent seminar on the law on opposition. One major indicative trend in the context of the prevailing "détente", as noted by the President of the independent national commission on human rights, is a decrease in human rights violations and assassinations with a likely political motivation over the last months, although such violent deaths still take place.

The modest progress in the political situation could, however, be jeopardized by economic conditions. With the considerable price increases in gasoline and basic food commodities such as rice and beans, the focus of public agitation has shifted towards the socioeconomic situation. In Bujumbura, everybody mentioned *la vie chère* (the high cost of living) which has become the common slogan for the problems caused by the rise of food and commodity prices. Civil society reacted with protests and a "stay-at-home" rally in March. In turn, the Government accused civil society organizations of abusing their respective roles and acting as a political opposition movement. While the controversy has so far been limited to mutual recriminations which are at times acrimonious but not violent, several interlocutors told me that the worsening socioeconomic situation has a clear potential to create unrest and is seen as potentially dangerous.

There is also some concern regarding the Commission nationale des terres et autres biens (the National Land Commission) whose policy some commentators perceive as one-sided, since its decisions to allocate land seem to favour the rights of returnees over those of existing landholders. Since the land issue is one of the most delicate in a densely populated Burundi heavily dependent on agriculture, a fair and equitable distribution of land is important also from a peacebuilding perspective.

On a more positive note, the fiscal situation has improved quite substantially owing to the increased efficiency of the Office burundais des recettes (the revenue office). With assistance mainly from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the revenue office has been re-formed so as to constitute an independent and more effective and efficient institution. Fiscal loopholes have been dealt with and corruption has been reduced. The energetic behaviour of the revenue office has provoked counter-reactions across the political spectrum and from parts of civil society, which feel that the agency is acting too aggressively. Still, the re-formed revenue office exemplifies a positive development within the institutional architecture of Burundi and its independence and effectiveness should be preserved.

Despite an increasingly difficult socioeconomic situation which is likely to worsen, I encouraged the Government to sustain the progress in the areas of political openness, good governance and human rights and the rule of law. In that context, I mentioned, among other matters, the trial of the person or persons responsible for the murder of Ernest Manirumva, whose apparent lack of progress had the potential

to hurt the image of Burundi. I underlined that the Peacebuilding Commission and its Chair remain committed to assisting and supporting Burundi. Advancements in the political and institutional fields would greatly help my efforts to generate goodwill on the international level which would be beneficial in the run-up to the meeting on the second poverty reduction strategy paper which Burundi hopes to convene in the fourth quarter of 2012.

The Government of Burundi plans to hold an international partners meeting to generate support for the second poverty reduction strategy paper. The conference would serve as a means for the Government to generate financial resources for the implementation of the paper whose overall cost Burundi estimates at 2.5 billion United States dollars. October 2012 has been mentioned as a possible date. The Government of Burundi has asked Switzerland to host the meeting. My Government is reviewing the request and we will be able to provide an answer in due time.

Overall, the reaction of the international community in Bujumbura to the planned event, though positive, is guarded concerning its financial impact. The echoes I have received, suggest that it would be unrealistic to aim at the generation of resources in the amount sought by Burundi. Most traditional donors assured me that they would continue to support Burundi within existing financial commitments. While some non-traditional donors signalled their interest in participating at the meeting and their openness to consider financing on a project basis, a gap still seems to exist between the expectations of the Government of Burundi and those of its international partners. I have informed the second Vice-President and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance of the budgetary difficulties that major donors are currently facing and warned Burundian interlocutors that it may be difficult to generate additional funding. I also urged them to define priorities, both substantive and time-related. It would be important to identify the most pressing and important needs — those that have to be addressed first. Further, Burundi has to step up the pace of both the conceptual and the organizational preparations for the meeting.

A number of things need to be done within the next weeks:

(a) Burundi and the international community should agree on the objectives, the setting and the format of the meeting. It may be helpful to establish scenarios on possible outcomes of the meeting and follow-up;

(b) An operational "task force" should be set up in Bujumbura comprising the major national and international actors. A timeline with a to-do list needs to be established and a division of labour defined. Burundi should have the leading role in this exercise, but the international community, especially the organizations of the United Nations system, should closely assist;

(c) Burundi, with the help of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, should define its most important priorities, bearing in mind that constraints in the international donor environment are tight;

(d) The Peacebuilding Commission, not only through its Chair, but also through all its members, should intensify the advocacy for Burundi, particularly among non-traditional donors.

The Peacebuilding Commission will continue to work with the Government of Burundi on the partners conference as well as on other relevant peacebuilding issues.

I remain at your disposal with respect to providing such further information and clarifications as may be required by the members of the Security Council. The Peacebuilding Commission will continue to monitor the situation and keep the Council informed on developments relating to the peacebuilding priorities agreed between the Government of Burundi and the Commission.

(*Signed*) Paul R. **Seger**
Chair
Peacebuilding Commission — Burundi configuration